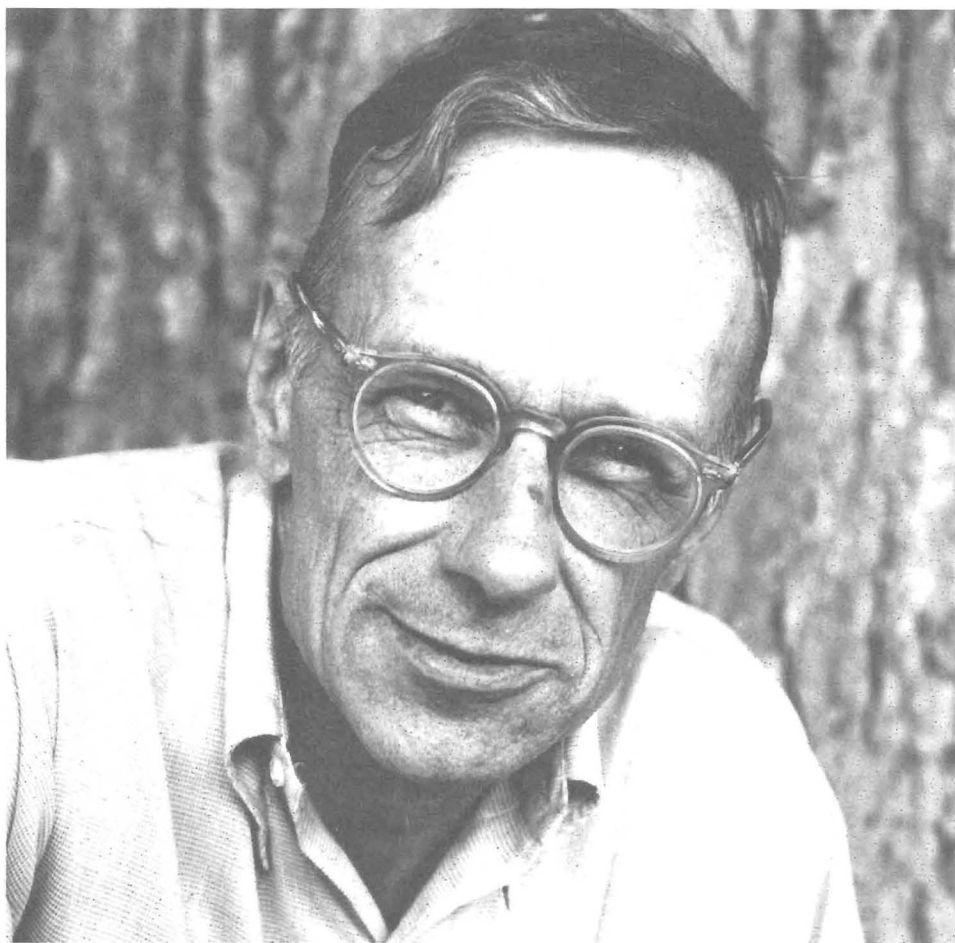


RUTLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY *Quarterly*

VOLUME XXIV No. 3

1994

25th ANNIVERSARY



**First President Frederic P. Elwert
(1969-1970; 1972-1974)**

His leadership and abilities as historian, collector and cataloguer were fundamental to the establishment and growth of the society and are still manifest in the organization today.

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James S. Davidson
(1970-72; 1982-84; 1987-90)

Third President



Arch J. Todd
(1974-77)

Fourth President



Robert E. West
(1977-79)

Fifth President



Sanborn Partridge
(1979-81)

Sixth President



Thomas K. Egan
(1981-82)

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(1984-87; 1990-93)

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Dir. Barbara Hood
Dir. Leonard Johnson

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Dir. Claire W. Savage
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V.P. Mary O'Brien
Trea. Sanborn Partridge

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Dir. Paul Toth/Ronald Butterfield

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Dir. Robert Solari

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Dir. Robert Beauchamp
Dir. Ronald Butterfield
Dir. Donald Wickman

Local History in Rutland

Rutland did not have a local historical society until 1969, yet it cannot be said that there was no interest in Rutland history. A number of people preserved and perpetuated Rutland's heritage through their individual research and publication of Rutland history.

Early Historians

The first work of history by a Rutland historian was a history of Vermont by the Rev. Samuel Williams which was published in 1794. In the early 19th century, Chauncey K. Williams (a grandson of the Rev. Samuel Williams) gathered unpublished notes for a history, primarily from the memories of aged Revolutionary War veterans. Henry Hall researched local historical material from which he published a series on local historical topics in the *Rutland Herald*. James Davie Butler drew upon the memory and papers of his father who had had a Rutland business from the late 18th to nearly the mid-19th century. Most of Butler's work ended up in notes and addresses. Edward Purdy (E.P.), a *Rutland Herald* editor, frequently contributed commentaries on local history to the *Rutland Herald*, even after he left Rutland.

In the late 19th century, Henry Clark assumed the role of local historian. He frequently wrote historical articles for the *Rutland Daily Globe*, a competitor of the *Herald*. His chapter on Rutland in the *History of Rutland County*, edited by Smith and Rann, is still a primary source because Clark not only researched and wrote of the period, but lived it. Mason Green produced a masterful history of Rutland and the *Rutland Herald* for the 100th Anniversary of the *Rutland Herald* in 1894. Except for F. E. Davison's *Historical Rutland* (1911), which was the first to preserve historical photographs from the last half of the 19th century, and Edward Temple's history in the 1920s, there were only a handful of treatments of a few local topics until near the middle of the 20th century.

The Beginnings of an Historical Society

The first public awareness of Rutland's past was in 1870 when the community celebrated the 100th Anniversary of the first settlement of Rutland. This event was celebrated by four days of programs and exhibits. A newspaper of centennial activities was published daily. Later Chauncey Williams compiled a book to preserve the details of these program and exhibit activities. The *Rutland Herald* editorially noted that "we need in this town a good fire-proof building in which

to deposit whatever relics and curiosities may seek such a place for security against loss, and there to remain open to public inspection as mementoes of the fruitful past." In 1881, in observance of the 100th Anniversary of the founding of Rutland County, a county-wide historical society was organized and continued for several years. Two volumes of Proceedings were published, but this venture soon terminated.

In the 1880s, after several unsuccessful attempts, a free public library was organized under the leadership of Julia C. R. Dorr. For years this library and the Grand Army of the Republic Memorial Hall, in which it was located, were the guardians of Rutland's historical acquisitions.

In the 1940s a faint attempt at founding an historical society did not survive the organizational meeting. A well-planned observance of the 200th Anniversary of the chartering of the Town of Rutland was organized by the Chamber of Commerce in 1961. Meldon School, then located on what was to be the site of the Koltonski Fire Station, was filled with exhibits of historical material during the summer of 1961. The adjacent Main Street Park was the scene of a bicentennial village where a sugar house, blacksmith shop and country store drew streams of visitors all summer long. Despite the interest exhibited in the history of the community, no historical society emerged.

The Birth of the Rutland Historical Society

In 1969 a group from the Rutland Woman's Club, headed by President Berenice Tuttle, accepted the challenge of forming an historical society. A meeting of all interested persons was called for 7:30 p.m. on Wednesday, 6 August 1969. Mrs. Bennett Bell, vice president of the Rutland Woman's Club, hosted the meeting at her home at 8 Billings Avenue. Several low-key presentations were made on the scope and purpose of an historical society. Names and addresses of those attending were recorded, tentative committee assignments were made and candidates needed for the various offices of a society were nominated.

The Rutland Historical Society was officially incorporated as a non-profit corporation in the State of Vermont on 19 August 1969. On 10 September 1969, a public meeting at the Rutland Free Library approved a constitution for the Society. On 17 November, the first slate of officers was elected. The Society was now a contributing entity within the community.

The Search for a Home

A concern almost as important as the existence of the Society itself was the need for a home where collections could be stored and displayed or utilized. Materials began to be presented to the fledgling Society almost immediately.

A petition to the Board of Aldermen to obtain the use of the Nickwackett Fire Station failed as the Fire Department used the building for storage. In 1971 the small brick church of the Seventh Day Adventists at 101 Center Street came on the real estate market. This building was erected in 1825 to house the original Bank of Rutland. After the mid-19th century the building was used as a barn,

a storage facility, an observatory, an art studio and, lastly, as a church. At the request of the Rutland Historical Society, the City of Rutland purchased the church building in 1971 for the use of the Society. The Rutland Historical Society had its first home.

For nearly ten years the Society worked and exhibited in this building until time began to take its toll on the structure. The basement was damp and little could be stored there. The heating system had seen better times and cracks began to appear in the walls. Engineering investigations placed a high price tag on salvaging the building. The structural problems led to closing the building to public use.

At this stage the Society again began to look for a home. The upper level of the Nickwackett Fire Station across the street was used for some limited storage by the Society. In the mid-1980s discussions with the City about the possible sale of 101 Center Street and the occupancy of the Nickwackett Fire Station by the Historical Society entered the realm of possibility. The successful sale of 101 Center Street and the gift to the Society of funds from two wills brought the renovation of the Nickwackett Fire Station to reality.

In the summer of 1993 the Rutland Historical Society took possession of the Nickwackett Fire Station as its new home. Although still City-owned, the building is "for the use of the Society" as was the building at 101 Center Street.

The renovated building has become a gem in Rutland's Courthouse Historic District. Although not large, the refurbished building at 96 Center Street has become a very functional and busy home for the Society.



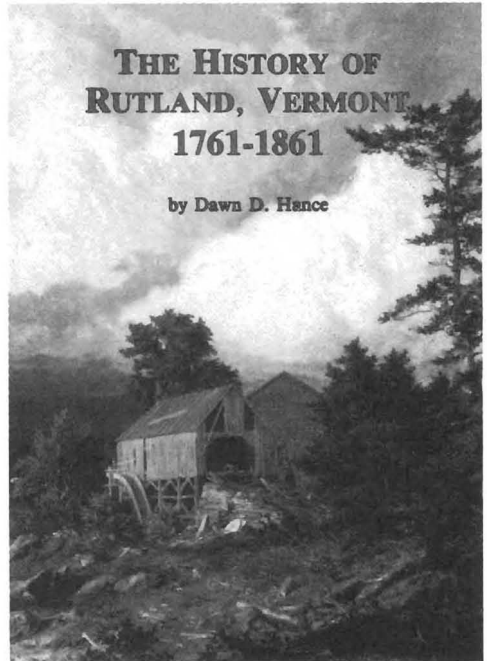
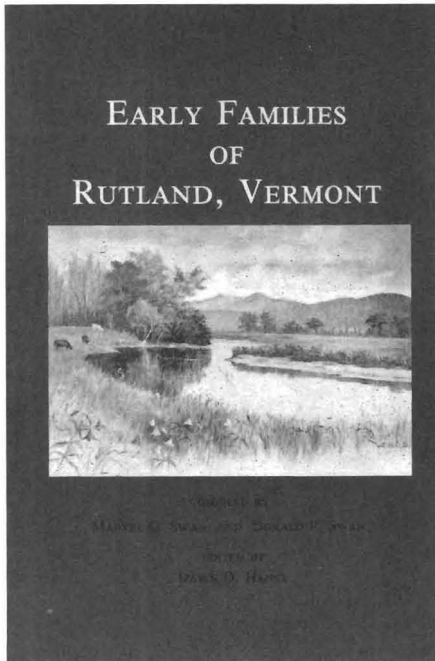
Cutting the ribbon at the Grand Opening ceremony 18 July 1993: (l to r) Historian Curtis Johnson of the Vermont Division for Historic Preservation, US Senator James Jeffords, Historical Society President Eleanor Elwert, Mayor Jeffrey Wennberg, Historical Society Vice President Dawn Hance and the Reverend Richard Tinney of the Immaculate Heart of Mary Church.

The Rutland Historical Society Today

Poised today between its past and future, the Rutland Historical Society has 25 years of collective experience from which to launch its future.

A publication program which started with an eight-page newsletter published three times a year in 1970, has now expanded to a regular quarterly journal that averages 16 pages an issue and is devoted to an in-depth treatment of a single topic. This is now supplemented by a new newsletter ("News from Nickwackett") which is issued four times a year. It is devoted to communication with the membership regarding the activities of the Society.

In 1978 the Society produced its first book, *Rutland in Retrospect*. This was a highly popular pictorial history which went through three printings totalling 2,500 copies and is now out of print. In 1990 the Society published *Early Families of Rutland, Vermont*, a genealogical volume and in 1991 *The History of Rutland, Vermont 1761-1861*, a topical history of Rutland's first 100 years. These books are still available at 96 Center Street. They were produced primarily through countless hours of volunteer research and writing by Dawn Hance whom the Society sincerely thanks.



Two most recent publications which are on sale at the Society.

The publishing plans of the Society include a continuance of its award-winning quarterlies and its new newsletter. The possibility exists for another book to deal with Rutland's last century and a quarter, but increasing costs for book publication may place this item on hold. The Society is seriously exploring the concept of publishing on videotape and possibly in other new media; e.g., audio tapes, computer disks, CD's, etc.

The Society's publishing program has provided the bulk of its service to the community during the last decade, as the Society did not have a home that would allow exhibition of its collections or its general use by the public. Now, the Nickwackett reading and research area offers expanded opportunities for the public to use the Society's collections. It is a hope of the Society that this may expand the scope of Rutland history research interests and the numbers of people who may become actively involved in producing reports on topics of local history. The Publications Committee is constantly looking for new volunteer authors.



Presentation of Early Families of Rutland, Vermont to President James Davidson by author Dawn Hance and researcher Donald Swan, 1990.

Currently the Society is quietly but regularly working to improve the organization and storage of its collections. In the future the Society will be making major efforts to make its collections more accessible through improved indexing, published finding aids, etc. The installation of low-cost copying facilities has been an important step in public accessibility to the materials. A phone-answering system allows a response to the public, even though public visiting hours are limited. Additional regular volunteers could mean an expansion of the current limited weekly visiting hours.



A portion of the second floor library and archives.

The Society hopes to carry out a more aggressive plan to fill gaps in its collections. Some of this collecting may be through photo copies or microfilm of material in other institutions. A long-range goal is to gather as complete a collection as possible of Rutland materials in one location so that Rutland research can become more convenient. The Society's Library, Archives and Artifacts Committees have received much professional training and stand ready to share their skills with new volunteers.

After a hiatus of more than a decade, the Exhibit Committee has an opportunity to produce changing exhibits of Rutland historical topics on a regular basis. An Exhibit Committee which produced award-winning exhibits at 101 Center Street is again back at work. New members are welcome. A potential exists for off-site exhibits in high traffic areas like malls, large office complexes, etc., and exhibiting through new media such as audio, video, computer disks and CD's.

The Society is very interested to involve the local schools in history programs from kindergarten through college. Special visits to the Society's exhibits and collections have been arranged for classes by appointment. It is hoped that the future may allow the Society to reach out into the schools themselves with publications, programs and exhibits.



PURDY

Rebecca Henderson's Dana School third graders enjoyed an educational tour.

Although the size of the Nickwackett building does not lend itself to large public meetings, the Program Committee attempts to arrange for public programs on Rutland history topics in larger meeting places in the area. Members who have

researched a Rutland history topic are particularly invited to arrange with the Program Committee for a public presentation. Many of these programs are very low-key and quite informal.

The Society's grand opening of the Nickwackett Fire Station in 1993 has been a great encouragement to the members who volunteer to work there on the various committees. The beauty and functionality of the building compliment all those who were involved in the design and execution of its refurbishing. The Building and Grounds Committee actively seeks volunteers able to help maintain the grounds and make the small regular repairs that even a new building requires. Although clean and shiny new, the building has a particular need for a housekeeping crew(s) that might regularly clean the facility.



A volunteer (Jim Davidson) at the computer keyboard.

All of these past and planned activities of the Rutland Historical Society require interested and active members. The Society has no paid employees so what happens is the result of the volunteering of the membership. A very high priority is to increase its membership significantly in the next five years. Those who would like to help in this recruitment should contact the Membership Committee.

With this increase in membership comes the hope that more active volunteers can be found for all areas of the Society's concern. The Personnel Committee works to try to find necessary talents for projects. The Personnel Committee itself can use knowledgeable and talented people.

The Rutland Historical Society today is what its collective members make it. Officers and Directors may plan and lead, but the Society as a whole will always depend on its membership to accomplish its goals. The future of the Society depends on the answer to two questions: (1) Will you be a member? and (2) Will you volunteer some time, knowledge or skills in some way?

A TRIBUTE



Jean C. Ross has served as managing editor of the Society's Quarterly for the last 15 years. This publication has received awards from the Vermont Historical Society at the League of Local Historical Societies' annual meetings. In 1983, the Rutland Historical Society also received a Certificate of Commendation for its publications from the American Association for State and Local History.

Jean earned a Master's degree from Syracuse University and has been an English teacher and speech pathologist. She has often been called upon to chair meetings, record minutes, deliver an address or revamp by-laws. When something must be spoken or written with a flair, Jean does the job with perfection.

My association with Jean began in 1983 when I wrote my first article for the Fall Quarterly. Little did I realize then that one day I would write two books on the history of Rutland and that Jean would become the editor. From the beginning of the book project in 1989 until its completion in 1991 Jean edited nearly eleven hundred pages of printed copy. (This in addition to having edited some thousand pages of Quarterlies over the last 15 years!)

Robert Sharp, the Society's publisher at Academy Books, paid Jean the ultimate compliment when he stated, "With Jean Ross involved you'll end up with a first class book."

While Julia Dorr is known as Rutland's poet laureate, we at the Rutland Historical Society feel the greatest affection and respect for Jean Ross—our own grand and gracious lady of letters.

Dawn D. Hance

RUTLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY
96 CENTER STREET, RUTLAND, VERMONT 05701-0423
(802) 775-2006

Membership in the Society is open to all upon payment of appropriate dues. (See dues schedule below.) With membership, for its period, goes a subscription to the Quarterly, any newsletters, entitlement to vote at business meetings, and benefits accruing from support of the Society's exhibits, programs, collections and library. The year through which membership is paid and the category are noted on all address labels.

Please send any address change on Postal Service Form 3576 (a postcard freely available at your local post office).

Annual Meeting is held at 7:30 p.m. on the third Thursday of October.

Annual dues categories are: Sustaining—\$125.00	Contributing—\$20.00
Sponsoring—\$50.00	Regular—\$10.00
Business—\$125.00	Senior Citizens
Students	(62 & up)—\$8.00
(18 & under)—\$8.00	

Special one-payment categories are: Lifetime—\$200.00 Memorial Gift—\$200.00

Advance payment for 2 or 3 years is welcome, helping to reduce costs.

Please make checks payable to: Rutland Historical Society

96 Center Street

Rutland, VT 05701-0423

Manuscripts are invited: address correspondence to the Managing Editor.

Managing Editor: Jean C. Ross

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RUTLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY

96 Center Street

Rutland, Vermont 05701-0423

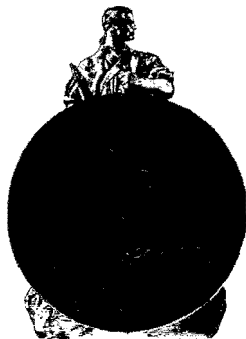
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